

EXHIBIT 8
DATE Feb. 3, 09
HS 9

Providing Written Testimony

International Choral Festival
Big Sky Repertory Theatre
Headwaters Dance Co.
Big Horn Arts & Crafts Association
Signatures From Big Sky

**International Choral Festival
Choir Outreach Tours
C&A Grant Testimony February 2009**

**Top Ten Reasons Why Missoula's International Choral Festival Hopes to Receive
C&A Grant Funding for the International Choir Outreach Tour Program**

1. So that Missoula's International Choral Festival can once again "bring the world a little closer."
2. So that other Montana families in communities such as Anaconda, Helena, Polson and Great Falls can experience cultural exchange through host family stays
3. So that senior citizens, disabled individuals, and various ethnic groups will not need to travel to Missoula's International Choral Festival in order to hear a live performance of a world-class choir
4. So that low-income audience members will be able to enjoy high-quality choir concerts that are offered free of charge in communities outside of Missoula
5. So that Montana communities can learn about international traditions, to appreciate the cultural differences of others, and to promote goodwill through the universal language of music
6. So that the choir members' awareness of Montana – and of the United State – might be broadened
7. So that choirs from around the world can travel outside of Missoula to perform in another Montana community and to meet many friendly and appreciative Montanans
8. So that children in Montana communities may hear a performance by choir members who live in a country they may have only read about, thus inspiring them to learn more about the world they live in
9. So that we help achieve global understanding by bringing diverse cultures together in Montana
10. And finally, so that memories can be made that will last a lifetime!

Big Sky Repertory Theatre
Informational Testimony in Support of Grant Application

The recent arts renaissance in Butte is helping to restore this incredibly historic city to the status it enjoyed in the early 20th century as a cultural epicenter. Big Sky Repertory Theatre is proud to be part of that effort. In addition to staging well-known classic and contemporary comedies, dramas and musicals, Big Sky Rep is committed to presenting shows that celebrate the rich tapestry of people and events that have defined Butte over the years. In that vein, the 2009 season will kick off with a brand-new original revue that features music and people's memories through the last century of the celebrated Columbia Gardens amusement park. If the packed theatre at the recent showing here of the *Butte, America* documentary (which will air in the fall on PBS) is any indication of how the people of Butte clamor to performances and events that celebrate our local history, the revue should be a great success.

Big Sky Rep also recognizes that, working together with other local organizations, we can achieve more toward furthering the renewed arts and culture movement in Butte. To that end, the management and boards of Big Sky Rep and Butte Center for the Performing Arts came together in a spirit of cooperation last year that has enabled Big Sky Rep to stage its performances in the beautifully restored Mother Lode Theatre, a historic gem in uptown Butte that would otherwise go largely unused during the summer months. We hope to continue and expand such partnerships in order to create a true community with a common purpose of elevating Butte once again as an arts and culture destination.

HEADWATERS DANCE CO.

“The Montana Suite” – Four Dances, Four Nationally Known Choreographers, Four Montana Landscapes, Four Years in the Making, All in One Performance.

Headwaters Dance Co. is applying for funding to help sponsor a tour of the “Montana Suite” around the state of Montana. For this project we’ve been commissioning one dance a year from a nationally known, modern dance choreographer, about a particular area of Montana. Each choreographer spent a week to ten days in their assigned area, meeting locals and reading fiction and non-fiction about the place. They then created a 20-minute dance based on their impressions, in collaboration with a Montana-based composer. This four-year project will be ready to start touring in its entirety in the winter of 2010. We’ve performed each of the four sections, as they were created, here in Missoula, where we’re based. We’re eager to show the dances in the areas about which the dances were made: the Boulder Batholith (highlighting Butte), the Hi-Line, the Rocky Mountain Front, and the Southeastern Corner (Billings to Glendive, Forsyth to Birney, including the Cheyenne and Crow reservations).

After performing Part I of the Suite, three years ago at the MotherLode Theater in Butte, we were thrilled to be regaled with stories from audience members, about their experiences in the mines. Clearly the dance, with its soundtrack of mine bells and costuming of headlamps and slickers, had touched a chord. One audience member talked about how riding through a lead mine with its shiny walls was like traveling through a hall of mirrors. Another talked about how peaceful it was to crawl into a cavern off the main track because it was so completely quiet and no one would see you in the pitch black. After a showing of Part II about the Hi-Line, a woman, who now lives in Missoula, said she’d grown up on the Hi-Line and always wanted to leave because it had seemed desolate to her; however seeing this dance made her see for the first time how it could be beautiful, too.

The goal of the Montana Suite is to celebrate the rich landscapes and diverse cultures of Montana, ultimately creating a “movement anthology” of this beautiful and complex state. It’s an opportunity to look at our state through a new medium, dance. The post-performance talkbacks are great forums for discussions about what makes this state unique and about where we’re headed.

**Hardin Area Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture, Inc.**

10 East Railway • P.O. Box 446 • Hardin, MT 59034 • Phone 406-665-1672 • Fax 406-665-3577

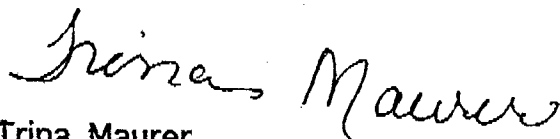
Dear Mister Chairman, members of the committee:

For the record, my name is Trina Maurer. I am President of the Hardin Area Chamber of Commerce & Agriculture in Big Horn County. We are testifying on behalf of grant #1448, requesting funding for an operational support grant for the Big Horn Arts & Crafts Association d/b/a the JailHouse Gallery. As an organization that works very hard to promote not only our area businesses but also our organizations that provide cultural and historical opportunities for our community, we are delighted to be offering this testimony for them. Hardin is located 15 minutes from the Little Big Horn Battlefield, surrounded by the Crow Reservation and close to the Northern Cheyenne Reservation, so we are in a great spot to bring tourists to our part of the State. The JailHouse Gallery, the only Art Center in Big Horn County has for 32 years helped to do just that with the excellent exhibits, Art programs and the workshops that they have provided for everyone to take part in whether they are residents or are just passing through. They make great partners. They have helped with our Last Stand Reenactment, hung student Art, worked with 4-H, the Boys & Girls Club and the Big Horn County Historical Museum, to mention just some of the organizations they have joined with, making the Gallery a wonderful asset to have downtown.



Their board works real hard with fund raising but it wouldn't be still going so strong if it weren't for the support from the Cultural Trust program. Grant #1448 is for operating and updated technology to get on line and a web site to better communicate and be be more accessible to their constituents. We believe they have proven their worth in supporting our area of the State. We are sorry, we couldn't be with you in person but hope this testimony will express our community's support and appreciation for the Association's work in enhancing and promoting the Arts here. Thank you!

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Trina Maurer". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Trina Maurer

Chamber Board President

From "Show and Tell" to "Write and Publish" : The Importance of Student Publishing - Shirley M. Olson

Creative writing starts very early in a child's development, long before, in fact, he or she can read or even hold a crayon. Children whose families spend time reading to them, interpreting TV and videos, playing word and letter games, and encouraging naming and re-naming, nick-naming, and other word games are the fortunate future writers of our world. First the Helen Keller thrill of recognizing the meaning of the words, and then the deliciously heavy accomplishment of writing a word that others can read set a young child on the road to creative endeavors. The much-anticipated work of first grade may enhance a child's creative abilities – or it may disappoint him by holding him and his class to lessons of strict guidelines and pedestrian concepts. American K-12 schools are not models of creativity; our "equal education for all" is too often interpreted as meaning the same curriculum, same activities and same age-level work for all, with few opportunities for creative writing. Student publication in writing contests et al are viewed by most teachers as "extras" they don't have time for, an attitude exacerbated by No Child Left Behind requirements.

Creative writing can and does meet many students' needs at many levels, all achieved in a common classroom. Writing enhances self-discovery and growth; it begs for excellence in editing and re-editing; it teaches humility and strength as it is tested by peers' reception; it creates notebooks full of ideas for future papers in many classes from science to college entry essays. Creative writing should be considered as important as outlining and the six parts of an essay.



Artwork by
Brittany Anderson
Humboldt High School
Humboldt, Montana

One opportunity we provide for young writers in Montana is the Montana Student Literary/Art Magazine, *SIGNATURES FROM BIG SKY*. *SIGNATURES* has been published annually since 1991 by three educator groups: MT AGATE, MATELA, and MAEA. In 1991, Del Siegle and I, AGATE board members at the time, gathered other teachers from around the state at the MEA conference to discuss the possibility of a state-wide magazine featuring student art and writing. Excited by the project, the group arbitrarily divided the state into seven areas, offered names of art and writing teachers from each area and set up a simple process. Each of the seven art and seven writing teachers would receive student work from their area, collect a committee to select a given number of the best work, and serve as a board to finalize the selections. Del Siegle, a graphic artist, offered to do the formatting and design of the publication, and I offered to distribute information, communicate with the 14 board members, and generally administer the project. Jan Clinard offered to help set up meetings and co-chair with me.

These simple procedures have proved manageably sound over the years, and we have never had a lack of volunteers for selection committee chairs, selection committee members, or submitting teachers. The three educator groups have worked together seamlessly, contributing funds, advertising *SIGNATURES*, and providing expertise. I doubt that any other state has a project involving multiple educator groups and so many volunteers! Each year 100-150 teachers submit work, 14 selection committees of 3 to 12 members meet, and about 200 students get published as a result. The selection committees draw in older students, college professors, and community artists/writers as well as teachers. We are very proud of this outreach! All work is volunteer except that of the formatter who is paid for her time and equipment.

Our first purpose is to provide an opportunity for Montana students K-12 to share their art and writing across our big state where many smaller schools live and work in some isolation. Technological connection is changing that, but the power of one's own poem or picture on the page of a book is hard to match! The wide variety of backgrounds of the published students (from rural areas, cities, mountains and plains, special education and gifted, foreign students or travelers, American Indians, and students from correctional and

support institutions) gives communities and the state a broad, true picture of the thoughts and feelings of our young people. We also know that the students themselves find inspiration and self-justification in reading and viewing the work of their peers. Working toward excellence on a piece of writing or art with their teachers is very different from participating in a blog. Their ideas may be the same, but their editing efforts and their sense of accomplishment in getting published will be building blocks for other life achievements. A testimonial from Missoula attorney Lucy Hansen Darty speaks to the importance of being published in *SIGNATURES*:

I graduated from Capital High School in 1992 and had the empowering experience of having a poem published in the 1991 and 1992 editions. From my own experience, creative high school students do not have nearly enough avenues for receiving recognition of their gifts. It seems that much more deference is paid to the athletically talented students, than those who have artistic talent. Giving artists and writers the opportunity to showcase their talents and be published is a powerful way to recognize talented students. This recognition provides students with inspiration to continue to pursue their talents following their high school years

One new teacher sitting in on our *SIGNATURES* session at the MEA/MFT 2007 conference confirmed the long-standing effects of being published. She had had a piece published in *SIGNATURES* when she was in middle school and now is asking her own students to submit work. A current 10th grader in Missoula, Coty Carlson says:

The thought of my work being published makes me want to peer edit more and hear other's opinions to help my work. If it's just to turn it in for an assignment I would probably only go through one draft. For I am thinking, what's the point of making it spectacular when only two people are going to actually read it? I wouldn't put in half the effort if I knew that only my teacher was going to read it. Because I just don't see a point in making a perfect work if no one will get to experience it. And if I get to write about something I like or want to write about I will put in a lot more effort.

A personal experience the very first year of publication convinced me that the magazine could be an important positive factor in a student's self image. "Steve" wrote copiously in the back of my English classroom, but rarely ever handed in a paper. In fact, he was rarely present. But I asked for a piece I read over his shoulder to put in a new magazine, and he shrugged and gave it to me. It was chosen and published. I put two of the magazines at the front of the room and when class convened, walked back to him with a copy for himself, announcing that Steve's poem had appeared in this new publication. The class was obviously shocked (as was he) and contrary to all my expectations, I asked if he would like to come up front and read his poem. He would! It was an epiphany! He still missed a lot of school and didn't hand in papers, but he received new respect in that class. Alyssia Bashar, freshman in Missoula, says:

I wrote a poem that was published in SIGNATURES magazine and posted in the capitol building and it has had an effect on the way I write. The possibility that something may be shown to the world (or even just a class or group of magazine buyers, which can feel like the world) primarily scares me, which isn't a bad thing. It scares me into wanting to write better, wanting to edit harder, wanting to make my writing the absolute best it can be...It's a great feeling to know that you have written not just something, but something that matters.

A Laurel third grader, struggling with language problems, showed her published work in *SIGNATURES* to her parent, and the teacher and parent worked thereafter with her on her newly recognized abilities.

In several schools, students have used *SIGNATURES* as a springboard to start their own local school literary/art publication. A copy simply left on a table near a classroom door can become a constant stopping place for all ages whose comments are: "I can't believe a second grader wrote that!" "I could do a poem like that – and better!" "What a great story – I love stories." "This poem is so sad; but I know exactly how she feels." In these published student writings are fresh metaphors, original concepts and comparisons, fantasies as compelling as Harry Potter and real-life experiences as painful as one girl's experimentation with cutting herself to relieve despair. The humor of children and youth is hilarious to other children and youth, and refreshingly original. High school girls write notebooks full of love poetry ; occasionally a "diamond" is submitted:

"Love-sick" (Grade 11)

In love?

No, I think not.

Love is happiness,

Flowers, and slow dances.

I'm not in love.

So queasy and weak I can hardly talk

That's not love, it's the flu.

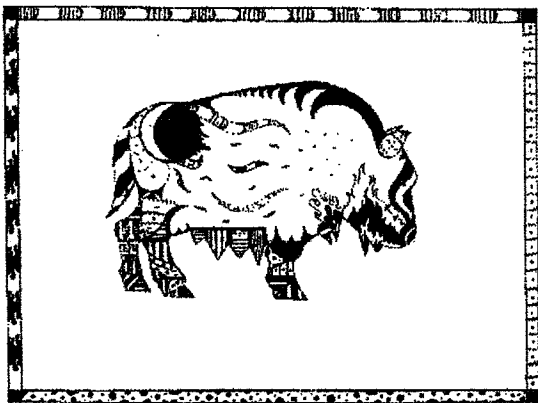
Odd sickness, really.

The benefits to students of having a larger audience are personal and motivational. Good writing starts from the heart; all our efforts to show our students correct form, grammar and spelling will not "connect" unless they are first encouraged to think, feel and respond to their experiences from their own minds, hearts and voices. We welcome these genuine offerings of our Montana students!

A second goal we have had in mind since the beginning is to produce a classroom tool for teachers. *SIGNATURES* can be used to model genres of writing, line breaks in poetry, metaphor, line, color and form in artwork, and many other techniques. To model one's own work after the greats like Shakespeare or Cezanne may seem impossible to students, whereas imitating the excellence of a piece by another 5th grader may not seem so intimidating! Sharing the magazine is also an experience in building tolerance for many kinds of ideas and styles. Copies are sent to each of the 890 public school libraries in Montana, available for teacher and student use. School librarians are encouraged to put the new edition out in the spring in a prominent place, and again in the winter with the new submission poster to remind students to work toward the Feb. 1 deadline. Some copies find their way to waiting rooms in doctors' offices, the principal's office at school, or other places where children and youth gather. One teacher in Billings convinced her principal to put a copy in each room of the middle school in Billings where she teaches! In the 2008 (18th) Edition, 200 students were published from

118 teachers in 86 schools of 56 towns in Montana. This was an increase of 7 teachers, 5 schools and 7 towns from 2007.

Freshness and variety of many "editors" or selectors gives *SIGNATURES* a universality that is unique. As the chairs gather for one final selection session early in March, real consensus takes place as well as some real learning about how evaluation of a work takes place in different areas, grade levels, and teachers. There is, for instance, an ongoing debate in art education about what is "original" and what is "copied" when a student works from a picture, say, of an elephant or anything not readily at hand. The 14 current board members work on these issues to the benefit of all. The



Artwork by
Jorin Vannuska
Coeur Valley Middle School
East Helena - Grade 8

board is fluid; there are 43 former board members from schools around the state or retired.

Our choices are made with three values in mind: originality, creativity, and excellence for grade level. Originality is recognized more easily perhaps by seasoned teachers or those who have read a lot of student work, but at the most basic level, an original piece brings forth an "aha!" response usually shared by most or all of the evaluators. (See the poem "Those Who Don't Know Any Better" by Tessa Rubel p. 27 in 2008 issue)

Creativity is a rare bird, but also recognizable by an uncommon maneuvering of character, plot, time, or nature; and by out-of-the-ordinary use of color, placement, and combination of objects. (See p. 49 of the 2008 issue by Ashton Nagel, whose green crayons bend in the wind like spears of asparagus in a more natural setting than a crayola box.) Fifth Grader Isabella Whitworth's "Kathleen O'Reilly, Tamer of the Wild Men" (p. 31, 2008), is a humorous look at women-in-history!

Excellence for the writer/artist's grade level is easily spotted by our evaluators, since within each committee are elementary, middle school, and high school teachers, cognizant of what their students ordinarily produce. Our choices in selecting the pieces to be published are circumscribed by several elements:

1. The broad age range. Some high school pieces are not appropriate for a younger audience.
2. The attempt to balance grade levels, genres, serious/humor, dark/light, and area of origin - a daunting task!
3. Creative and original pieces from students who have been encouraged to write honestly their deep hurts, unabashed joys, offbeat humor, outrageous discoveries and personal views of the world. Suicidal outpourings, however, are usually judged too personal for this publication,

We are happy to observe that many Montana teachers are encouraging creative writing although we also observe many writings in the cages of form, sample-example, et al rather than free flying thought. Traditional forms from haiku to sonnets are beautiful and rhyming is fun, but when the form becomes the focus of our teaching, particularly elementary students' real inspiration or feelings may be skewed or lost. We do not accept class sets of any writing exercise: we depend on the classroom teacher to be our first "selector" and cannot burden our volunteer committees with stacks of material that has not first been judged "the best" by teacher or class. The writings must stand alone; unusual fonts, placements or illustrations are not helpful.

4. We heartily endorse editing and work between teacher and student to make *SIGNATURES* more of a publishing experience than a "contest". Teachers can help by pointing out the terrible importance of every word in a poem and helping the student to clear away the "debris" in a story or essay. Our purpose is to encourage positive editing, which can inspire whole classrooms in the process, or at least help one writer to reach for excellence. Peer editing is also a very helpful process in preparing a piece for publication and usually spills over into group learning. We do expect sentences, punctuation and spelling to be carefully done. The teacher may certainly serve as proof reader, seizing an opportunity to do a little one-on-one instruction.

5. Board members are often enlightened themselves by reading diverse types and levels of student writing, as Lorilee Evans-Lynn, Big Sky High School in Missoula attests:

My biggest fear when I began as a board member was reading the little ones' work. As a high school teacher, I had no idea what to expect, and frankly, I dreaded it, thinking it would be tedious and dull, on the level of "See Jane run." Quite unexpectedly, it became the little ones' work my students and I fought over reading first. Their vision and clarity is absolutely pure. They are still delighted by the marvel of who they are and the world of their senses. I would encourage teachers from the youngest grades to introduce creative writing early and take it up often, especially allowing poems that do not rely on specific patterns, freeing them to think about something other than structure. If we could convince them we are interested in their particular ways of seeing the world before they are consumed by the need to conform, we might not only give them a jump start on writing, but on the ease with which they move through later school years when being different is a disgrace.

6. A few testimonials by teachers illustrate how the publication is used and the effects observed on the students:

- *As an Art teacher of 38 years in Montana and Alaska, I have used every copy until they show serious wear. The degree of excellence and quality of the work has been an inspiration to many students and to other*

Artwork by
Celia Chan
Power High School
Power - Grade 12



classroom teachers as well. I have seen first hand the pleasure students and parents have shown at their work being accepted in the publication. I have used the good books as an inspiration and guideline for students of all ages to aspire to. The beautiful booklet and unique arrangement, combining writings with the artwork draws the students to work together to strive for similar publications in other schools where I have worked. I have placed copies in the school libraries of every school I have been associated with. – Jim Seaton, former President of MAEA

•*SIGNATURES FROM BIG SKY* fosters a love for language and visual arts and serves as a motivational factor for students who love to write or create original art. As a teacher of gifted and talented students, I have witnessed the observable pride in students whose work is published. When student work is selected for the magazine, elementary schools in Billings typically acknowledge the student's accomplishment at an awards assembly. How thrilling it is for the student, the parent, the teacher, and the school! *SIGNATURES* is a wonderful teaching tool. As students look through the magazines from different years, they find excellent examples of different types of writing. Because of this, students more readily accept the teaching of a variety of writing techniques. For first-time writers or artists, the examples in the magazine serve as a springboard to independent writing or art. *SIGNATURES*, past and present, are used and enjoyed throughout the year. – Karen Nave, K-6 GT Teacher, Billings Public Schools

Finally, we are hopeful that parents' pride in their child's artistic ability will be enhanced by the experience of publication in *SIGNATURES*. Parents may discover the importance of arts being taught in the classroom; their awareness can even save the arts from cuts considered when school funds are limited, or inspire increased opportunities in music, art and writing in their schools. After publication, a flurry of subscriptions come from parents around the state, some to be sent to grandparents and others even out of state.

Our reach has been extended by the use of twenty or so writings and pictures from the previous edition in the Montana Energy Conservation Calendar which is sent to people all over the state by the MT Department of Health & Human Services to those who request aid with their heating bills. Stefanie Flynn (MAC) has done a beautiful job of formatting the calendars and it is great advertising for us! Also Ms. Flynn, endorsed by Lt. Gov. Bohlinger, arranged a display of art and writings from the 2008 edition of *SIGNATURES* in the Capitol Rotunda during the month of October. The Montana Arts Council, particularly Beck McLaughlin, has been very supportive of the magazine for years; we are grateful for their continued contributions, suggestions and grants.

The march to conformity is ever-present in our schools; teachers are even hampered now in their efforts to offer their personal diversities to enhance their students' education. On the other hand, gifted education research has given us new impetus to differentiate in the classroom, and renewed appreciation of the importance of the arts in K-12. Creative writing is a powerful tool, which *SIGNATURES* hopes to encourage in Montana schools. We have seen that it can be our students' defense against depression and fear in the face of world events and abuses closer to home. It can lift their spirits and ennoble their thoughts; it can surprise them with their own depth of thought and feeling and lighten the tasks of a fact-based school life. In 2001, students from elementary, middle school, and high school poured out their thoughts about 9/11 in *SIGNATURES*. Native American students often submit writings and artwork about their history and losses, as well as enlightening accounts of cultural customs and expectations. The flavor of our western state is always present in *SIGNATURES'* stories, poems and essays about hunting, fishing, mountain hikes, rodeos, wildfires, and chores. Always present, too, are writings about the puzzlement of growing up, of childhood dreams and fears, of grandparents, of illuminating moments of learning or growth. We feel that our Montana literary/art student magazine has been a record and a triumph of student artistic achievement and we hope it will continue to offer inspiration for their endeavors.

Article to be published in the Montana Writing Project *Journal*, March, 2009 by Shirley Olson, Editor/Coordinator of *SIGNATURES FROM BIG SKY*.

From "Show and Tell" to "Write and Publish" : The Importance of Student Publishing - Shirley M. Olson

Creative writing starts very early in a child's development, long before, in fact, he or she can read or even hold a crayon. Children whose families spend time reading to them, interpreting TV and videos, playing word and letter games, and encouraging naming and re-naming, nick-naming, and other word games are the fortunate future writers of our world. First the Helen Keller thrill of recognizing the meaning of the words, and then the deliciously heavy accomplishment of writing a word that others can read set a young child on the road to creative endeavors. The much-anticipated work of first grade may enhance a child's creative abilities – or it may disappoint him by holding him and his class to lessons of strict guidelines and pedestrian concepts. American K-12 schools are not models of creativity; our "equal education for all" is too often interpreted as meaning the same curriculum, same activities and same age-level work for all, with few opportunities for creative writing. Student publication in writing contests et al are viewed by most teachers as "extras" they don't have time for, an attitude exacerbated by No Child Left Behind requirements.

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Artwork by
Brittany Anderson
Montana High School
Kalispell, Montana

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I wrote a poem that was published in SIGNATURES magazine and posted in the capitol building and it has had an effect on the way I write. The possibility that something may be shown to the world (or even just a class or group of magazine buyers, which can feel like the world) primarily scares me, which isn't a bad thing. It scares me into wanting to write better, wanting to edit harder, wanting to make my writing the absolute best it can be...It's a great feeling to know that you have written not just something, but something that matters.

A Laurel third grader, struggling with language problems, showed her published work in *SIGNATURES* to her parent, and the teacher and parent worked thereafter with her on her newly recognized abilities.

In several schools, students have used *SIGNATURES* as a springboard to start their own local school literary/art publication. A copy simply left on a table near a classroom door can become a constant stopping place for all ages whose comments are: "I can't believe a second grader wrote that!" "I could do a poem like that – and better!" "What a great story – I love stories." "This poem is so sad; but I know exactly how she feels." In these published student writings are fresh metaphors, original concepts and comparisons, fantasies as compelling as Harry Potter and real-life experiences as painful as one girl's experimentation with cutting herself to relieve despair. The humor of children and youth is hilarious to other children and youth, and refreshingly original. High school girls write notebooks full of love poetry ; occasionally a "diamond" is submitted:

"Love-sick" (Grade 11)

In love?

No, I think not.

Love is happiness,

Flowers, and slow dances.

I'm not in love.

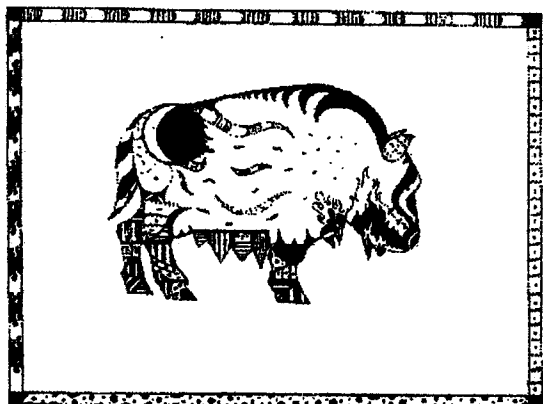
So queasy and weak I can hardly talk

That's not love, it's the flu.

Odd sickness, really.

The benefits to students of having a larger audience are personal and motivational. Good writing starts from the heart; all our efforts to show our students correct form, grammar and spelling will not "connect" unless they are first encouraged to think, feel and respond to their experiences from their own minds, hearts and voices. We welcome these genuine offerings of our Montana students!

A second goal we have had in mind since the beginning is to produce a classroom tool for teachers. *SIGNATURES* can be used to model genres of writing, line breaks in poetry, metaphor, line, color and form in artwork, and many other techniques. To model one's own work after the greats like Shakespeare or Cezanne may seem impossible to students, whereas imitating the excellence of a piece by another 5th grader may not seem so intimidating! Sharing the magazine is also an experience in building tolerance for many kinds of ideas and styles. Copies are sent to each of the 890 public school libraries in Montana, available for teacher and student use. School librarians are encouraged to put the new edition out in the spring in a prominent place, and again in the winter with the new submission poster to remind students to work toward the Feb. 1 deadline. Some copies find their way to waiting rooms in doctors' offices, the principal's office at school, or other places where children and youth gather. One teacher in Billings convinced her principal to put a copy in each room of the middle school in Billings where she teaches! In the 2008 (18th) Edition, 200 students were published from 118 teachers in 86 schools of 56 towns in Montana. This was an increase of 7 teachers, 5 schools and 7 towns from 2007.



Artwork by
Jorin Vannuska
East Valley Middle School
Poetries - Grade 8

board is fluid; there are 43 former board members from schools around the state or retired.

Our choices are made with three values in mind: originality, creativity, and excellence for grade level. Originality is recognized more easily perhaps by seasoned teachers or those who have read a lot of student work, but at the most basic level, an original piece brings forth an "aha!" response usually shared by most or all of the evaluators. (See the poem "Those Who Don't Know Any Better" by Tessa Rubel p. 27 in 2008 issue)

Creativity is a rare bird, but also recognizable by an uncommon maneuvering of character, plot, time, or nature; and by out-of-the-ordinary use of color, placement, and combination of objects. (See p. 49 of the 2008 issue by Ashton Nagel, whose green crayons bend in the wind like spears of asparagus in a more natural setting than a crayola box.) Fifth Grader Isabella Whitworth's "Kathleen O'Reilly, Tamer of the Wild Men" (p. 31, 2008), is a humorous look at women-in-history!

Excellence for the writer/artist's grade level is easily spotted by our evaluators, since within each committee are elementary, middle school, and high school teachers, cognizant of what their students ordinarily produce. Our choices in selecting the pieces to be published are circumscribed by several elements:

1. The broad age range. Some high school pieces are not appropriate for a younger audience.
2. The attempt to balance grade levels, genres, serious/humor, dark/light, and area of origin - a daunting task!
3. Creative and original pieces from students who have been encouraged to write honestly their deep hurts, unabashed joys, offbeat humor, outrageous discoveries and personal views of the world.

Suicidal outpourings, however, are usually judged too personal for this publication,

We are happy to observe that many Montana teachers are encouraging creative writing although we also observe many writings in the cages of form, sample-example, et al rather than free flying thought. Traditional forms from haiku to sonnets are beautiful and rhyming is fun, but when the form becomes the focus of our teaching, particularly elementary students' real inspiration or feelings may be skewed or lost. We do not accept class sets of any writing exercise: we depend on the classroom teacher to be our first "selector" and cannot burden our volunteer committees with stacks of material that has not first been judged "the best" by teacher or class. The writings must stand alone; unusual fonts, placements or illustrations are not helpful.

4. We heartily endorse editing and work between teacher and student to make *SIGNATURES* more of a publishing experience than a "contest". Teachers can help by pointing out the terrible importance of every word in a poem and helping the student to clear away the "debris" in a story or essay. Our purpose is to encourage positive editing, which can inspire whole classrooms in the process, or at least help one writer to reach for excellence. Peer editing is also a very helpful process in preparing a piece for publication and usually spills over into group learning. We do expect sentences, punctuation and spelling to be carefully done. The teacher may certainly serve as proof reader, seizing an opportunity to do a little one-on-one instruction.

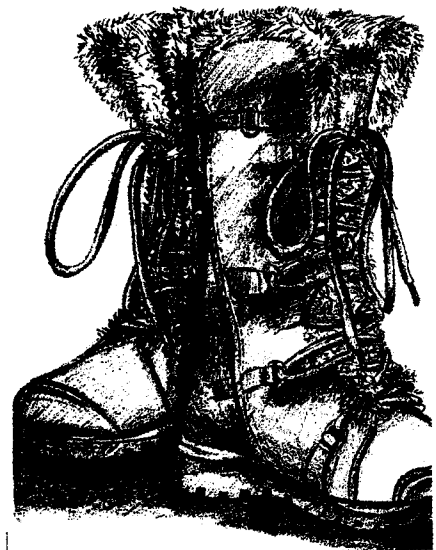
5. Board members are often enlightened themselves by reading diverse types and levels of student writing, as Lorilee Evans-Lynn, Big Sky High School in Missoula attests:

My biggest fear when I began as a board member was reading the little ones' work. As a high school teacher, I had no idea what to expect, and frankly, I dreaded it, thinking it would be tedious and dull, on the level of "See Jane run." Quite unexpectedly, it became the little ones' work my students and I fought over reading first. Their vision and clarity is absolutely pure. They are still delighted by the marvel of who they are and the world of their senses. I would encourage teachers from the youngest grades to introduce creative writing early and take it up often, especially allowing poems that do not rely on specific patterns, freeing them to think about something other than structure. If we could convince them we are interested in their particular ways of seeing the world before they are consumed by the need to conform, we might not only give them a jump start on writing, but on the ease with which they move through later school years when being different is a disgrace.

6. A few testimonials by teachers illustrate how the publication is used and the effects observed on the students:

• As an Art teacher of 38 years in Montana and Alaska, I have used every copy until they show serious wear. The degree of excellence and quality of the work has been an inspiration to many students and to other

Artwork by
Celia Chan
Power High School
Power - Grade 12



classroom teachers as well. I have seen first hand the pleasure students and parents have shown at their work being accepted in the publication. I have used the good books as an inspiration and guideline for students of all ages to aspire to. The beautiful booklet and unique arrangement, combining writings with the artwork draws the students to work together to strive for similar publications in other schools where I have worked. I have placed copies in the school libraries of every school I have been associated with. – Jim Seaton, former President of MAEA

•*SIGNATURES FROM BIG SKY* fosters a love for language and visual arts and serves as a motivational factor for students who love to write or create original art. As a teacher of gifted and talented students, I have witnessed the observable pride in students whose work is published. When student work is selected for the magazine, elementary schools in Billings typically acknowledge the student's accomplishment at an awards assembly. How thrilling it is for the student, the parent, the teacher, and the school! *SIGNATURES* is a wonderful teaching tool. As students look through the magazines from different years, they find excellent examples of different types of writing. Because of this, students more readily accept the teaching of a variety of writing techniques. For first-time writers or artists, the examples in the magazine serve as a springboard to independent writing or art. *SIGNATURES*, past and present, are used and enjoyed throughout the year. – Karen Nave, K-6 GT Teacher, Billings Public Schools

Finally, we are hopeful that parents' pride in their child's artistic ability will be enhanced by the experience of publication in *SIGNATURES*. Parents may discover the importance of arts being taught in the classroom; their awareness can even save the arts from cuts considered when school funds are limited, or inspire increased opportunities in music, art and writing in their schools. After publication, a flurry of subscriptions come from parents around the state, some to be sent to grandparents and others even out of state.

Our reach has been extended by the use of twenty or so writings and pictures from the previous edition in the Montana Energy Conservation Calendar which is sent to people all over the state by the MT Department of Health & Human Services to those who request aid with their heating bills. Stefanie Flynn (MAC) has done a beautiful job of formatting the calendars and it is great advertising for us! Also Ms. Flynn, endorsed by Lt. Gov. Bohlinger, arranged a display of art and writings from the 2008 edition of *SIGNATURES* in the Capitol Rotunda during the month of October. The Montana Arts Council, particularly Beck McLaughlin, has been very supportive of the magazine for years; we are grateful for their continued contributions, suggestions and grants.

The march to conformity is ever-present in our schools; teachers are even hampered now in their efforts to offer their personal diversities to enhance their students' education. On the other hand, gifted education research has given us new impetus to differentiate in the classroom, and renewed appreciation of the importance of the arts in K-12. Creative writing is a powerful tool, which *SIGNATURES* hopes to encourage in Montana schools. We have seen that it can be our students' defense against depression and fear in the face of world events and abuses closer to home. It can lift their spirits and ennoble their thoughts; it can surprise them with their own depth of thought and feeling and lighten the tasks of a fact-based school life. In 2001, students from elementary, middle school, and high school poured out their thoughts about 9/11 in *SIGNATURES*. Native American students often submit writings and artwork about their history and losses, as well as enlightening accounts of cultural customs and expectations. The flavor of our western state is always present in *SIGNATURES'* stories, poems and essays about hunting, fishing, mountain hikes, rodeos, wildfires, and chores. Always present, too, are writings about the puzzlement of growing up, of childhood dreams and fears, of grandparents, of illuminating moments of learning or growth. We feel that our Montana literary/art student magazine has been a record and a triumph of student artistic achievement and we hope it will continue to offer inspiration for their endeavors.

Article to be published in the Montana Writing Project *Journal*, March, 2009 by Shirley Olson, Editor/Coordinator of *SIGNATURES FROM BIG SKY*.

